

Western Grain Transportation Act

which takes days, at considerable cost in shrinkage and shipping. No wonder farmers are going bankrupt today.

Do the huge subsidies to the railroads guarantee that branchlines will not be abandoned and that good service at reasonable rates will be provided? I heard someone in the House say that the Minister has heart, and someone else said he is heartless. Maybe he has a carburetor instead of a heart, I am not sure, but he certainly should take another look at this Bill. I tend to doubt the Minister because of the past record of mismanagement. Listen to the tales of overnight closure of branchlines with the resultant death of full towns in the West. The trouble with a subsidy is that companies get used to them. They feel the word "efficiency" is no longer in the dictionary. They can go ahead and do whatever they please with the full knowledge that they will be bailed out when it is necessary.

● (1740)

Is my time running out? I have only three or four more sentences, Mr. Speaker; about 30 seconds.

In conclusion, I want to keep in mind the best interests of all Canadians. There can be no favouritism here. We are facing a major question of national unity. Regional differences are one matter, but political issues are at stake. Frankly, I think the proposal reeks of political engineering. In the long run, the future of our country is at stake.

I thank Your Honour for the extension of time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin my short speech today by posing a question. Why is this major initiative to deal with the biggest transportation problem in the country today not worth careful and lengthy consideration by Parliament? Why is there this rush, this attempt to impose closure? Why is there such a decision by the Government, which it forces through because it has a majority, that the hours the House sits shall be extended to 11 o'clock in the evening three nights a week?

The proposed change in the Crow rate contained in the Bill at the present time, represents an attempt by the Government to impose an historic change on a region of Canada, western Canada, in which the Government has no members. I suggest that with a polarized Parliament such as this, in which the Liberal Government has no Members from the area where the legislation with which we are dealing will have such a major effect, it will change the established rights of that part of the country in a way and to an extent we have never seen before. I suggest that when those kind of changes are being brought forward, a Government which cares, one which wants to keep the country together, should have moved cautiously in wiping out the Crow rate, regarded by so many people in western Canada as being their Magna Carta.

People in western Canada and in Atlantic Canada have felt for many years that they are second class citizens, that their interests are sacrificed for the benefits of central Canada, for the benefits of Ontario and Quebec. The kind of provisions

contained in this Bill will go a long way toward convincing many people in western Canada that their fear is justified.

It has been argued by the President of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, in support of the Government's plan, that it would put almost \$1 billion into industrial, transportation and agricultural developments all across Canada. That is true. However, one must ask where that money will come from.

If one asks that question, one finds the answer to be very clear. The money would come from the pockets of Canadian farmers. Where would they obtain that money? They could not increase the price of the grain they sell, because if they did they could not compete with the Australians, the Americans or the Argentinians, all of whom are in very stiff competition with the Canadian farmer for their share of the world's grain market. Therefore, the Canadian grain farmer or producer would find his income reduced by the amount of the increase in the cost of transportation.

What would the Canadian farmer do? He would have to reduce the money he now spends and has spent for farm equipment, automobiles, trucks and other consumer goods. That would have an immediate effect on the farm equipment manufacturers and on the automobile companies, because they would use less steel, less rubber and less of all the products which go into producing the very heavy equipment they sell, and of which the farmer is a major, if not the major, purchaser.

The plan is supposedly to pump \$16 billion into upgrading the transportation system. The farmer is told that it would only cost him 2 cents a bushel in the way of an increase. We know and the farmers know that that is just a beginning, that in fact, the increase will rise every year so that he will be looking at an increase in transportation costs over the next eight or ten years of something in the neighbourhood of 400 or 500 per cent.

There are people who are scandalized by the idea that a freight rate established in the 1890s should still be applied in the 1980s. Those people should remember several things. They should remember the principle of taxation, which is that any old tax is a fair tax, and any new tax is an unfair tax. It is true that 90 years have elapsed since the Crow rate went into effect, but all Governments since that time have had opportunities, which they have used, to review the Crow rate legislation and to change it. It has been scrutinized and examined by three or more Royal Commissions. All of them recommended against any change.

I am not opposed to a change in the Crow rate agreement under certain conditions. What are the conditions as I see them? The Crow rate was part of a package agreement. The railways agreed to move grain at a very cheap rate. They received compensation, the compensation being millions of dollars in cash grants, which they are still receiving, and millions of acres of land, some of the most valuable acreage in Canada. The Cominco property in Trail, B.C., was part of the land which the CPR received. Therefore, if the Government or anyone else wants to renegotiate the Crow agreement, I say let us renegotiate the whole agreement. We will ask the farmers